DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 033 458 EA 002 567

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TITLE	Turmoil in the Schools: The Partners Respond.
Pub Date	8 Jul 69
Note	12p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Education Commission of the States (Denver, Colorado, July 8, 1969).
EDRS Price	EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC-$0.70
Descriptors	Academic Freedom, Activism, Boards of Education, Community Involvement, *Educational Policy, *Educational Problems, Federal State Relationship, *Governance, *Policy Formation, Political Influences, *School District Autonomy, State School District Relationship, Teacher Associations

Abstract

Socioeconomic problems related to the current turmoil in the schools are often regional or national in scope. To effectively meet such problems as the rise of ghettos, the black revolution, and disaffection of the young, a revised system of educational governance is proposed, calling for a new relationship between political and educational forces and a more equitable partnership among local, State, and Federal educational authorities. As a consequence of the envisioned system, the power to establish educational policy would not be concentrated in the hands of any single authority and the governing of education would include the checks and balances needed to insure the protection of individual rights, the establishment and maintenance of meaningful educational standards, and the inclusion of a broader viewpoint in the formulation of educational policy. (JH)

ED033458

TURMOIL IN THE SCHOOLS: THE PARTNERS RESPOND

Annual Meeting
Education Commission of the States
Denver, Colorado - July 8, 1969

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Governor Terry Sanford is perhaps the only one present who will recall my contribution to the Education Commission of the States at the time of its founding. At the time I was serving as U. S. Commissioner of Education, and had already been labelled a number of times, separately and together, as a Czar and an incompetent.

My contribution was to stay away from your meetings. If asked in Washington whether the purpose of the Commission was to stop the Commissioner from exercising federal "control" over the schools, I did my best to look hurt and say that there was no need for such a countervailing force. I thought this would help in getting the Commission going.

Privately I was delighted that the Commission was being planned, partly because it would be a way of restraining the powers of the federal government. But only partly. I had been long enough in office to learn that the Congress was quite strong enough all by itself to keep the Executive Branch from becoming Czarish, and (if you will forgive a gentle bureaucratic snarl) through congressional control over the purse strings of Office of Education personnel, to keep the Office from becoming dangerously competent.

It was not the role of the Commission as a countervailing power to federal encroachment on education that appealed to me, primarily, useful though that was as a motive for getting it going and as a reason for my helpful absence. The deeper reason was that the Commission brought together forces whose collaboration was essential if education was to expand and

EA 002 567

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

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improve in the years ahead. Governors, state legislators, leaders in higher education and in the schools, board members, teachers and academic groups all have played a major part in determining the policies that govern education, in providing the resources and in overseeing the implementation of programs. It seemed only sensible that they be brought together in a setting that forced their attention to a consideration of the implications to the national scene of their decisions on the state and local level. It was, in effect, a decision to strengthen the role of the states in the balance of powers of our system of government, and a decision to bring politics and education closer together.

The current turmoil in the schools, it seems to me, forces us to re-examine these decisions to see whether some other, perhaps more drastic, action is needed. General disatisfaciton, particularly on the ground of low quality in city schools and irrelevance and impersonality in higher education and a high cost for both schools and colleges, has led to community demands for control, to taxpayers revolts and to legislative demands for student discipline. Is it our system of governance that has gone wrong; or is it the results of such factors as the Vietnam war and the civil rights revolution; or is it that the educators have taken over more ground than they can patrol and still do their job -- or is it a mixture of all three that has caused the turmoil in the schools and the faltering response to that turmoil?

My tentative answer is that it is the mixture of all three. Clearly we are not here to discuss U. S. foreign policy, so it is appropriate

to discuss first the system of governance. Let me start with a confession. The older I get, the less confident I become about the traditional wisdom of the educators on the relation between school management and the rest of government. I used to think that the schools were better off the farther they were separated from the political process. Education seemed to me a very special affair, which differed in kind, not in degree from other services of government. I am not so sure anymore. Education cannot stand alone in contemporary society.

The danger to freedom of thought and freedom of teaching of too close a connection with government seems particularly great to anyone who has lived through the rise of Hitler and now sees dimly the tragedy of education in China. To allow control over what is taught about the past, or over criticism of the present, to fall into the hands of men or groups with special political interests is an ever present and an ever grave risk. The schools of any nation are an instrument of social control, and my generation has seen what can happen if they are not protected from forces inimical to human freedom.

Such forces are not necessarily at the national level, seeking national control. Local school boards have crumbled in the face of assaults from the narrow minded and politically ambitious. Political parties are naturally interested in who is appointed to jobs supported by public taxes. "Politics," in the pejorative sense in which that word is unhappily too often used, has been and can always be a factor leading to low quality or venality. Civil service systems and teacher certification laws were established to deal with real problems of political interference as well as to assure professional competence. Enthusiasts who want to throw out all programs of certifying teachers forget that most members of city councils and school boards love

their voices. Complaints about stultifying, bureaucratic results in schools and colleges do not solve these problems; they merely point to the fact that our present solutions bring other problems with them. To link schools and colleges closely to the shifting interests and influence of political parties is undeniably risky.

An obvious case in point is federal and state legislation designed to curb student disorders and turmoil. Since the conference has detailed special sessions to this topic, it would be inappropriate for me to comment in this panel. But it may be appropriate to suggest that the Commission may only have seen the beginning of the general topic of freedom of speech and freedom of protest on the campus. If, as many at this conference have suggested, there is evidence of a national "swing to the right" in educational matters, the punishment of students or institutions may only be the beginning. Our history suggests that aroused public opinion may demand restrictions on curricula and the right of universities to allow radical and unpopular opinions, whether of the right or the left, to be expressed on the campus. Many of us in this room recall all too well the need of defending the ancient and honorable principle of academic freedom in the 1930's and the 1950's. The fact that modern society demands a more effective partnership between educators and political leaders does not imply that academic freedom is a lost cause. Quite the contrary, it means that the governors and legislators have a greater responsibility to protect that freedom than they had before. Academic freedom is essential to a free society, not just a protection for the professors. It is too soon to tell, it seems to me, whether the partnership being created by this Commission will be strong enough to protect academic freedom from assaults both from within and outside. The historian may well judge its success by this test alone. The schools and colleges are in

politics whether they like to admit it or not. To play the ostrich by pretending that this is not so is sure to have the effect that the ostrich's position has on that inelegant animal -- with his head in the sand he cannot see what is coming. In fact it is reasonable to speculate that the schools, by trying to steer clear of "politics," isolated themselves in recent years from getting a good view of the demand for higher standards in science, of the onrushing effects of urbanization, and of the disaffection of minority groups.

Conventional wisdom says, of course, that protection against the danger of isolation of the schools lies in the non-partisan lay board, either elected by the people, or appointed by the people's representative. Its tasks are to assure control over the professional, to maintain a continuing public interest in the schools, and to keep the schools in proper relation to other social forces. I am not one of those who despairs of this mechanism of educational governance. The burden of proof is on those who wish to place direct control over the management of the schools in the hands of politically chosen officials, with no protective machinery inbetween. They must persuade me and others like me that our present method of governance, despite all its faults and insensitivities, is worse than the evils that may flow from political ambition and patronage. In short, we are worried that a change which makes the schools just another agency of local and state government may be just a move from frying pan to fire.

Obviously to take this position is not to say that any change is unwise. It is rather to force attention on the areas in which our present arrangements seem to be unsatisfactory and to see whether we can devise ways to adapt what we have to what we need to accomplish. Our present method of governance has not adequately predicted the effect on schools of social and economic forces,

and particularly the rise of ghettoes, the Black revolution, and the disaffection of the young. These social and economic forces, it must be emphasized, are usually regional, national or international in character, and not subject to the control of the local school board or college board of trustees. These bodies can (indeed must) adjust their affairs to the winds of change; but by themselves, they cannot affect the winds very much. They need allies and partners if they are to maintain the strength to resist the dangers of improper and partisan control and at the same time try to solve their problems. Federal, state, and local levels of government are all involved.

The preservation of academic freedom and freedom from undesirable political controls depends upon the way in which this new partnership is developed. In thinking about the problem, there seems no better source of inspiration and ideas than the Constitution of the United States and the writings of the founding fathers and those who have adapted their ideas to contemporary problems. Constant watch against too great a concentration of power in the hands of any single authority, the careful planning of checks and balances, protection of individual rights, against the improper force of the majority, and regular reference to the wishes of the people are as relevant in education as in governing other aspects of the society.

In this context of balance of powers, it seems to me that we rely too much on the power of local school boards. By this I do not mean that they should be abolished, but rather that they should be subject to regular and rigorous review by an authority that has the advantage of broader vision and greater detachment from local circumstance. Distinctions can be drawn between

administrative,supervisory and appellate powers; between the operating tasks, the maintenance of standards, and the setting of goals and general policy. We all know that the lines between them can be -- indeed should be -- fuzzy, but there is a difference in these functions and we have barely begun to work them out in the governance of education.

It seems clear that the state must take a far more active role in the future than it has in the past. The turmoil in the schools has shown that the state must have the power to intervene when local situations get to the point of immobility and/or eroding standards. The situation in New York City in 1968-69, for example, required Commissioner Allen to move in (those were the days when he really did have statutory powers), and in the end led to decisions by the state legislature on decentralization. It would not surprise me if comparable situations were to arise in other cities.

The state must have the power to assure that minimum schooling standards are maintained by local authorities. If such standards are not maintained, and if, after due warning and the provision of what the state believes to be needed extra funds, the local authority is unable to raise the standards, the state should have authority to require the locality to face up to its problem, if necessary by removing the local authorities. Even the threat of such action whould ordinarily be enough for the start of reform, and the action itself should be rare indeed. But the lack of such a monitoring and triggering device has cost us dearly in quality already. PROVIDING ~~Private~~ state educational authorities with such powers ~~such powers~~ will obviously require not only action by legislators and governors for new legislation, but also their support when action is taken.

The same line of reasoning, it seems to me, will have to be applied to federal-state relationships in so far as federally supported programs are concerned. In the final crunch, federal funds may have to be withheld if educational standards in the states are not maintained. We have seen this happen in the case of certain school districts in regard to civil rights matters. It is not beyond imagining that similar withholding would be possible and desirable on issues of academic standards and academic freedom, if matters reached a point where the federal government became persuaded that a particular state was not playing its part. I doubt if our mobile society can afford to permit pockets of educational incompetence in the future. One of the major tasks of the Commission may well be to work out ways to police itself.

I have dwelt upon the problem of maintaining and raising of standards because it seems to be the most serious challenge facing the governance of education and a root cause of much of the present turmoil. If we cannot find a way to face up to it, which uses the three levels of government, we will find that other problems are far more difficult to solve. No one should underestimate how hard the job will be. We lack instruments to measure many of the results we look for from schooling. We have to face the fact that large areas of the great cities are dissatisfied, to put it mildly, with what they obtain from both state and federal government and increasingly seek direct lines to Washington. They can be expected to resist state controls. The educational profession, on whom the heaviest responsibilities fall, is no different than any other profession and does not much care for the monitoring

of its results. Perhaps worst of all, the public is alternately impatient and forgetful: it wants problems solved in a hurry, and education remedies, by the very nature of the learners, have to be calculated in years, not months.

Yet if the matter of standards continues to be postponed as educational governance wrestles, as it must, with the immediate issues of budget and salaries and buildings and community relations, it is easy to predict that any resolution of these very issues will be temporary. As we struggle to achieve equality of opportunity, we may lose sight of the fact that it is but a means to the end of equality of opportunity -- of quality.

Turning now to the question of whether teacher and academic groups have acquired too large a measure of control on both policy and practice in the schools, let me take a position that may surprise you from an ex-academic man: "not yet, but they are well on their way." The lesson from what has happened in my home state seems to be that the city schools cannot reform themselves without resort to the state for both money and for decision on administrative structure. But perhaps more significant is the fact that the major influence on the state legislature came from the educators, in the form of a combination of the city school teacher's union and the Council of Supervisors. They were able to bring influence and power to bear that was greater than the influence of the State Board of Regents and a variety of other interests which also had views on the organization of city schools.

As one looks into the future, it seems likely that organized teachers' groups will inevitably be forced to concentrate more attention on state than on local education Boards of Education or Boards of Trustees. For the state will clearly become increasingly the source of funds, and basic policy decisions

on salary and working conditions will increasingly be made by state authorities. The way in which those decisions are actually made then becomes a key question for this Commission. To allow the influence of teachers and supervisory staff to become, in effect, the most powerful of all forces at the state level would seem to me to endanger the balance of powers so necessary to proper educational governance -- and there may be a danger of such imbalance if we are not careful in school affairs.

So far I have suggested that an alliance of political forces with educational forces is a necessary measure at the state level; and that it must learn to support academic freedom; that states must be prepared to move into local school situations (and perhaps also at the college level) when qualitative standards fall too low or when management appears to be at a standstill; and that there is a danger of the organized teachers achieving too much actual power.

You will have noticed that I have not spoken explicitly about the "community groups," as they are now called, which are increasingly expressing their dissatisfaction with the schools or colleges serving their children--and demanding a greater voice in their policies and practices. I sympathize with them, and it seems to me that we must respond to the need for giving a greater influence to those most directly concerned with our schools and colleges: the parents of the young children and the students at the older ages. This means some kind of decentralization or breaking up into more manageable sized units of governance, where the community or student groups have an actual, not a decorative, role to play. In the case of the City University of New York, I favor the creation of new subordinate units of control: Boards of Overseers for the fifteen institutions under the general charge of the Board of Higher Education--Boards which include citizen, alumni,

faculty and student representation and which have substantial powers of decision on appointments and curricula. Comparable powers should be given to local Boards within large city school systems. We dare not close our ears to the clear cry that rises above the turmoil in the schools: education is for the learner just as much as education is for the benefit of the state. His hopes and fears must be taken into account.

Probably most people would agree with this statement of one of the causes of turmoil. But few agree on how to rearrange our partnership. From my angle of vision, the most difficult task may be a technical one: how to set policy and monitor standards without drying up or frustrating local initative and local management.

One technique may grow out of the National Assessment Program, which I am delighted has now come under the direction of the Education Commission of the States. It has the potential of giving state authorities the evidence on which to base a kind of domestic educational Distant Early Warning system. Signs of educational trouble could be obtained without massive testing or inspection, and remedial action taken before it is too late.

Another possibility is to establish closer policy liason with the Congress and the federal Commissioner of Education, so that national policy and federal legislation can more accurately reflect state needs than it does today. It has sometimes occurred to me that a well organized group with a specialized and narrow interest in education -- the needs of handicapped children, or the needs of schools under the so-called "impacted areas" -- have more influence on the Congress than the combined efforts of the states expressed through governors, state legislators and school and college leaders. This is not to complain about these two worthy causes, but rather to suggest that policy

formations can get out of perspective under such circumstances -- and has produced some anomalous results. An annual and formal review of federal policy by the Education Commission of the States might therefore be appropriate, with an annual report to the appropriate committees of the Congress. Let me suggest that topics that might be high on the agenda for such recommendations would be a method of forward funding by the Congress; methods of assuring that research and development programs in Education be maintained and strengthened, and that the use of university faculty for research be so conducted as not to weaken the tie between professor and student.

The turmoil in the schools has caused tragedy and it has frightened a good many of us. But it may have one good result: it may force us to re-examine our assumptions and try out some new ways to govern ourselves.